

# FREEDOM

80P

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Vol 69 No 20 • 8 NOVEMBER 2008

## NEW ROUND OF MAIL CUTS

### Profits rise but jobs to go

As predicted in 2007 by *Freedom*, the Royal Mail is moving towards further job cuts, attacks on standards and potentially pension reduction, even as it announces a doubling of profits for the year.

The service has seen profits soar to £177 million despite a massive reduction in custom after it cut 40,000 jobs and rearranged workforces to eliminate some payments.

Alongside the existing cuts to the main workforce, and amid mass closures of post offices around the country, a major new initiative is set to shut down many regional sorting offices, to replace them with a few 'Super Hubs' scattered around the country.

The move could potentially lead to another 20,000 job losses with around 34 offices to close.

Royal Mail workers have already raised major concerns about the news, which, it is believed, could pose a serious threat to the viability of a universal postal service.

One worker on postal message board royalmailchat.co.uk said: "One thing that bothers me with Super Hubs is that at present if something goes wrong at one sorting office there is enough capacity in the system to divert the pipeline around and still

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## BIRMINGHAM'S HOMELESS VILLAGE

Organisers who have built a squatted tent village on a piece of disused council land in protest at the city's continuing housing crisis say they've been overwhelmed by the level of support from nearby residents and supporters.

The organisers have been inundated with people bringing tea, blankets and even staying on site, and have attracted around a dozen homeless people since it began to the ten-strong tent community.

Talking to *Freedom*, a spokesman said: "In a way it's been too successful! But we've had so much support and had so many people come down that we thought we'd try and make it last as long as we can. All we want is to sit down with the council and talk to them about it and they're just saying

### LENS CAP CHRISTIANIA



Repeated clashes have broken out in the autonomous enclave of Christiania in Copenhagen, following police attempts to evict residents. In the early hours of 28th October, supporters of Christiania started gathering in the vicinity of the police barricade. Police used pepper spray in some instances, but generally threatened arrest to keep people at bay. After spats throughout the day between police and the demonstrators, a counter-attack was launched at around 7pm, as the wind picked up and blew some of the tear gas away. Police responded with a barrage of gas, nearly expending their supplies. Despite the large scale of the riot, only 12 people were arrested, several of whom were bystanders, according to the demonstrators.

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ISSN 0016-0504



## NEWS

### IN BRIEF

**DEFENCE:** A major blockade and protest of the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) at Aldermaston near Reading to mark UN Disarmament Week has taken place. The Aldermaston Big Blockade was aiming to disrupt work on existing Trident nuclear warheads and the facilities that will enable the development of their successors at Britain's nuclear weapons research laboratory.

**FIRE SERVICE:** The Fire Brigades Union has called for a complete review and overhaul of a 999 IT project done under the private finance initiative after the Government was forced to admit it has hit major technical problems. The project was supposed to be fully operational by November 2007, but is now set to continue into 2009 with costs now over £1.5 billion.

**HOUSING:** Plymouth council have been accused of using dirty tactics to try and force a Yes vote to proposals for council housing stock to be transferred over to arm's-length ownership. The GMB union say Plymouth Council tried to catch housing tenant activists out by holding an emergency meeting to trigger an earlier start date than they had forecast.

**RACISM:** Trevor Phillips, chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, has suggested that racism would be best undermined by giving preferential treatment to the white working class.

He said: "The best defence against prejudice against immigrants will be to make those who resent them competitive, to give them a place in society. We may need to do so with the sort of special measures we've previously targeted at ethnic minorities."

**PENSIONS:** Employees of private companies who have invested in the company-run pension pot could be facing yet more attacks on their payments and conditions after it emerged the value of the sector has dropped by nearly a third from £552bn to £395bn in recent months.

The new blow to private pensions follows changes two years ago which saw millions switched over from final salary to working-life pensions, effectively cutting hundreds of thousands of pounds off their value, following failed investments by company bosses.

Around four million people are in workplace pension schemes.

**POLICING:** Police have used a banner drop by animal rights supporters protesting against a company in Southampton as an excuse to raid the house of the pair who had been involved.

The raid last month saw 25 police kick down the door at 10am, arresting the two for criminal damage and conspiracy to blackmail – because, the police said, they had used spray-paint to make the banner, and spray-paint had been used in other actions against HLS targets previously.

### LENS CAP NEWCASTLE



The second Northern March Against Racism took a message of anti-racism, working class solidarity and internationalism to the streets of Newcastle on 25th October. Marching from the West End to Grey's Monument, the protestors demanded decent living conditions for everyone, in the face of an economic crisis. As the protestors arrived at Grey's Monument they were confronted by a counter-protest of around twenty fascists from the National Front and Combat 18, holding a banner reading: 'Stop Immigration – Start Repatriation'. The police stood by and allowed them to continue with their open racism for some time before politely asking them to move on.

## DPP vindicates privacy campaigners

Concerns of privacy campaigners have been vindicated by a statement made by the outgoing head of the Crown Prosecution Service, who has slammed the 'paranoia and fear' driving the government's attempts to create a database-powered surveillance state.

During an appearance on Channel 4 News on 20th October, Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Ken Macdonald attacked the 'paraphernalia of paranoia' of an increasingly security-obsessed government that seeks to claim greater and greater powers of surveillance. His implied targets included the National Identity Scheme, the proposed telecommunications database in the Communications Data Bill, 48 days detention and other planks of government policy.

Politicians, Macdonald warned, should "take very great care to imagine the world we are creating before we build it. We might end up living with something we can't bear".

Privacy groups have welcomed his remarks as the latest warning from a high profile figure repudiating the government's increasingly totalitarian approach. Following Sir Ken's appearance, General Secretary of NO2ID Guy Herbert applauded his statement, but argued that "Sir Ken is too generous by half".

"His calls for balance, vigilance and debate are mistaken in the face of a government that looks for any possible opportunity to collect information on the citizen, then suggests anyone who disagrees is somehow an accessory to terrorism, or paranoid."

"Privacy campaigners want to live in a trusting society with fair and controlled investigative powers. We are the ones asking for evidence and rationality. It is the stalker state – driven to try and watch everyone, everywhere, all the time – that is addled by fear and paranoia."

James Horrox

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# One-day strike, again, in PCS

The PCS has called another one-day strike for next month which will affect 260,000 public sector workers – despite failing to make an impact with several other one-day strikes this year and amidst falling confidence in the tactic's ability to get pay increases.

The union, which has taken pains to paint itself as the most combative in the public sector, has brought workers out from the DVLA, Department of Work and Pensions, Local Government workers, members of the ACAS industrial negotiation service, and in Customs and Excise.

However pay has continued to lag behind even the private sector, where union density is currently hovering at around 17%, with the government and local councils repeatedly refusing to give in and able to absorb such minor disruption.

## New round of mail cuts

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keep the mail flowing. However if the Super Hubs are hundreds of miles apart and one goes down because of an incident, it's going to affect a very large geographical area indeed."

The CWU have not commented on the likely response to such major new attacks should they be confirmed when the Hopper Review is published in full. In 2007 it came under heavy criticism for its handling of a major industrial conflict in which a number of one-day strikes caused huge damage to the functioning of the Royal Mail, but then saw negotiators recommend a deal which was all but identical to the one that had previously been rejected.

The latest strike, which will affect passport and tax offices, job centres, immigration services, museums and driving test centres, is again attempting to pressure the government into re-opening a pay cap agreement which union chiefs negotiated earlier this year.

The move comes as the National Union of Teachers ballots for a fresh series of strikes in schools and the Unite union agrees to coordinate industrial action with civil servants in the NHS, where it has 100,000 workers.

With double-digit inflation increases, lower-grade workers in the sector have been struggling. Large numbers work for barely over minimum wage and have had difficulty coping – particularly as food prices rise at well above the average rate.

It is thought that a strike in November may be particularly pointed as larger

numbers of people enter the recently-depleted job centres following the financial crisis.

However previous strikes have had little effect, with Prime Minister Gordon Brown and chancellor Alistair Darling arguing that it would cause a rise in inflation.\* Rising dissatisfaction with the tactic has seen a fall in support with many unionists arguing it is simply not worth losing the money.

Anarchist groups have been arguing the case for both more inventive tactics and an attitude which switches from 'making our point', to 'causing them more damage than they can handle'.

**Rob Ray**

\* This view is challenged in the current issue of *Black Flag* magazine, contact [blackflagmag@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:blackflagmag@yahoo.co.uk) for details.

Union chiefs were accused of complicity in publishing a pay deal which was touted as a 6.9% rise, but which when taking into account a failure to backdate pay and prior obligations, turned out at 2.5% – the same amount which had been rejected previously.

The cuts are part of an ongoing drive to make Royal Mail commercially viable – something which critics have said amounts to fattening up the project for sale on the open market.

One in three pieces of mail are already handled by private companies – though the final leg of the journey to people's doors is still handled by Royal Mail – and it is

expected that this figure will rise as restrictions on the service's competitiveness continue to bite.

The drive has already seen upwards of 100,000 roles lost since it began in the 90s, and conditions and pensions have deteriorated for those who remain.

Continued over-exposure in high-risk stocks has seen Royal Mail's pension deficit rise to £4.04 billion this year, despite an agreement which would see future employees put on a low payout and older workers forced to put off retirement leading to fears that more attacks could be on the horizon as managers attempt to make up for their mistakes.

## PUBLIC SECTOR

# Unrest over academies expansion

Several school populations have been fighting back as the programme to move dozens over to become academies – which are privately funded and controlled – continues to expand.

As 70 failing schools join the 310 already on the list of schools which will be or already are now operating as academies, coalitions of parents in Brighton and Hove, Ipswich and Sheffield are challenging moves to switch them over.

In separate developments, privatisation moves in Goldsmiths College, London, and Essex University are also being fought by staff and students, and sponsors of the Unity Academy – one of the early flagships of the initiative – have pulled out.

The academy lost its primary backer, Amey, who deny financial pressures are behind their decision.

In Brighton and Hove, two schools with excellent reports from education watchdog Ofsted are to be merged to create the largest primary school in the area. Parents have been outraged by the proposals, which they see as needlessly increasing class sizes and disrupting their children's education.

St Luke's Against Merger (Slam) have noted that there appears to be no hard evidence that education will improve under the new system, and with 600 children the academy will not be able to offer targeted help.

In Ipswich, students from Holywells High school have spoken out against plans to turn the already much-improved school into an academy, and have the backing of parents and teachers.

The school is set to be taken over by the Church of England, after it was named as the preferred backer by the government, but



students have publicly stated that it is not wanted.

Meanwhile in Sheffield, activists are attempting to challenge a consultation ballot over change to an academy for Parkwood and three primary schools, saying a government pledge to provide funds only in the event of a 'yes' vote amounted to community blackmail.

In higher education, Staff and students at Goldsmiths College have rejected proposals to privatise the recruitment and teaching of international students.

In an online poll hosted by UCU, staff and

students were asked what effect they thought a joint venture would have on the academic reputation of the college.

Of those voting, 720 (94%) said a joint venture with INTO University Partnerships would adversely affect its academic reputation, while 92% believed it would adversely affect the College's reputation as an employer.

A similar poll at Essex University, in which 90% of voting staff said that the university would be damaged by a joint venture with INTO led to that university abandoning the plan.

## Ballot on NHS pay opens

Balloting has opened for NHS members of Unite over the current three-year pay deal negotiated earlier this year.

The ballot will ask 100,000 members if they are prepared to take industrial action, including strike action, in protest at the pay deal.

Union bosses have backed off their effective recommendation to accept a three-year package of increases which amounted to around 8% over three years, after critics of the deal were proven right that it would come in substantially below the rate of inflation.

The deal worked out as a pay increase of 2.75% from April, followed by further increases of 2.4% in 2009–10 and 2.2% in 2010–11.

They called a ballot as it emerged that inflation was rising to above 5% for just this year – using CPI inflation, which misses

out vital information such as mortgage rates, and began to talk tough about taking action.

Unite's ballot is underpinned by a 95% rejection by its members of the government's unilaterally imposed three-year pay deal, worth in total 7.99% – barely half the current rate of inflation. It is further reinforced by a 75% vote in favour of an industrial action ballot.

After the ballot closes on 12th November, Unite will have a 28-day 'window' to take action that its members have voted for. Members include laboratory staff, the technicians who maintain essential equipment, porters and domestics.

The vast majority of members of the GMB union rejected the pay offer, although the GMB has yet to ballot members on industrial action. Workers have thus been divided up and their collective position drastically weakened.

## Scots ballot on pay offer

In Scotland 150,000 local government workers are being balloted to see if they will accept an improved pay offer of 3% following two one-day strikes.

Members of Unison, Unite and the GMB are being consulted on the new offer, made after their previous 'final' offer of 2.5% following industrial action. Unison is recommending members reject the offer.

"This offer is not a good offer – especially when inflation is riding around 5%" said regional organiser and lead negotiator Dougie Black. Further strikes had been scheduled, but are now suspended pending the outcome of the ballot. This is in marked contrast to the tactics pursued by Unison for other council workers in the UK, in which they did not schedule future strike action, and instead of letting members vote on the pay offer, referred the decision to the arbitrators, ACAS.

**IN BRIEF**

**BANKING:** The multi-billion pound bailout of British banks supplied by Gordon Brown may not be enough to stave off a collapse, according to the Bank of England. The Bank's report into financial stability said that recession could lead to losses of multiple times the amounts which have already been put up, pointing to the recession of the early 1990s which led to credit losses of £130bn.

**BORDER CONTROL:** The Home Office have announced that anyone it deems to be too radical attempting to enter the country will be both denied access and 'named and shamed', citing a need to crack down on fundamentalist preachers.

The new rules create a legal 'presumption in favour of exclusion' for people on the government's list, meaning they will have to prove they weren't radical any more before being admitted to the UK. The rules apply to EU citizens.

**FINANCE:** London is set to lose about 194,000 jobs in the next two years as the credit crunch takes its toll on the financial services sector, according to an economic consultancy. Oxford Economics predicts employment in the capital will be hit more than in any other UK region. Employment will plunge by 97,000 next year and by a similar amount in 2010.

**HEALTH:** The credit crisis is threatening the number of new medicines coming to market as funding for biotechnology companies declines. At the same time, the world's pharmaceutical giants are making huge cuts to their workforces. Although the bulk of the estimated 60,000 cuts worldwide in the past few years has been to salesforces, there have been cuts to research and development. GlaxoSmithKline, the world's second-largest pharmaceutical company, announced last month that it would cut 850 jobs in research and development.

**MEDIA:** The National Union of Journalists has rejected the voluntary redundancy package that ITV is offering to regional news employees. The Union says the offer isn't attractive enough for their members to leave the broadcaster willingly and could lead to compulsory redundancies.

Meanwhile Bectu, which represents the technical staff within the departments has released a statement urging the NUJ and ITV to 'resolve their differences', complaining that too much time is being spent on it.

ITV plan to shed 429 positions from its 17 news bureaus across the UK.

**UTILITIES:** Ofwat today has fined Tendring Hundred Water a total of £42,000 for failing to provide the regulator with reliable, accurate and complete information. The fine has been confirmed following an accounting error that led to the company misreporting information in its June return 2006.

# Ship builders on strike

Workers at the Appledore shipyard in north Devon have gone on a six-day strike against unfair payment practices which have seen them losing £60 to £80 per week in comparison to similar workers for the same company just a few miles down the road.

They say they feel like 'poor relations' compared to colleagues working at Devonport Dockyard in Plymouth, despite having a long history at the site and having a highly skilled workforce.

Michael Tkaczuk, 57, from Bideford, told reporters: "It is not just the money ... there are other issues with the way we are treated compared to those in Plymouth. This has not

just sprung up overnight, it has been festering for the last four years and it is unfortunate that it has come to a head in the current economic climate."

The strikes are taking place on Fridays and Mondays, with the first day seeing around 180 workers refusing to work.

Stuart Fegan, an organiser with the GMB union said: "GMB members are very disappointed that the management have not listened. The offer that was put to our members falls short of the parity we seek with other yards in the group."

The pay row centres on a contract to build hull sections for two new aircraft carriers.



## Private sector shedding jobs

Thousands of jobs could be under threat and pensions attacked as telecommunications giant BT gear up for a major re-organising drive in the next few months.

The company, which employs around 106,000 people, has been talking about making major changes since April and has reportedly been in consultations with the Connect union.

BT say the cuts will mostly take the form of voluntary redundancy, and that many roles could have their funding reassigned to creating lower-level positions in the company.

The move is connected to attempts by BT to cash in on the lucrative multi-national business communications market, as it moves away from being a consumers-only business. The plan involves the transferring of 20,000 employees into business units called BT Design and BT Operate.

It is also planning to overhaul its 69,000-strong pension scheme to slash costs, increasing the retirement age from 60 to 65, as well

as increasing employee contributions and switching to a calculation based on a career average rather than final salary.

The redundancies are the latest in a series of mass layoffs which have been announced across the private sector, particularly in the financial and construction industries, and comes as cuts are considered by American Express, CSR, British Airways, and around 5,000 roles which are expected to go from the BP group – despite the company making record-breaking profits for the year.

Motorola are dropping some 5,000 roles worldwide, hundreds are to go from Domino's Pizza company, while across the board hundreds more are set to be dropped from print, radio and television media groups.

The company is however set to be a trailblazer for the year in launching attacks on pensions, which have come under strain during the credit crunch as they have been historically tied up in high-risk investments, including providing insurance for bad debts.

## INTERNATIONAL

### IN BRIEF

**GERMANY:** 8,000 workers have launched a series of co-ordinated strikes at automobile and electronics companies as it and employers spar over wage increases. The strikes took place at 17 companies, the union, IG Metall, said in a statement. Car maker Audi was particularly hard hit, as 4,000 workers walked off the floor of an Audi plant in the southern city of Ingolstadt.

**GLOBAL:** The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that the present financial crisis is likely to lead the loss of some 20 million jobs world wide. The ILO added that "the number of working poor living on less than a dollar a day could rise by some 40 million – and those at two dollars a day by more than 100 million".

World leaders were cautioned not to try to solve the global financial crisis by restricting labour migration, a move adopted by governments during the Asian 1997 crisis.

**GREECE:** Thousands have marched in Athens following the coffin of a Pakistani asylum seeker killed by the riot police in a wanton attack against immigrants queuing for asylum papers. In the early morning of 26th October, riot police charged immigrants queuing outside the central immigration office of Athens using batons and tear gas to try and "make them stand in a straight line".

**INDIA:** Around 7,000 teachers in the Union Territory have decided to go on indefinite strike from 5th November. After launching a series of protests, the Puducherry Teachers' Associations Co-ordinating Committee and Puducherry, Karaikal and the Mahe Teachers' Associations Joint Protest Committee will strike over various demands, including higher pay taking into account qualifications, length of service and experience.

**IRAN:** Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane workers have formally re-established their labour union. The Haft Tapeh workers' original syndicate was established back in 1973, but the Iranian government banned independent unions in the 1980s. This is the second workers' union that has been formed recently.

**MEXICO:** One in four women in Mexico has suffered physical, and sometimes sexual, violence at the hands of their partner, according to a new Amnesty International report. Thousands are put at risk of repeated abuse because weak or ineffective protection measures fail to ensure their safety. Many face a range of obstacles when trying to report cases, such as the refusal of officials to accept complaints, inadequate investigations, and poor enforcement of protective measures.

**PALESTINE:** The Free Gaza Movement's third boat, the Dignity, carrying 27 crew and passengers, has arrived in Gaza in spite of Israeli threats to stop them. The boat landed in defiance of an ongoing Israeli naval blockade of the area as the state attempts to squeeze Palestinians living on the strip.

### LENS CAP WARSAW



Anti-Racist Action members of ZSP and other anarchists went to the Russian Embassy in Warsaw on 1st November to place a line of photos and show their respects to some of those who have been murdered by fascists and neo-nazis in Russia. In Poland there is a holiday – the Day of the Dead – where people traditionally go to graveyards to commemorate the lost. Candles were left by the embassy and information given out on the problem of racism, xenophobia and fascist violence in Russia.

## Reporter robbed and beaten

Pedro Matias, a well-known reporter who writes for *Noticias*, a local daily paper in Oaxaca, as well as the national weekly *Proceso*, has been kidnapped, beaten, tortured and robbed in Oaxaca.

Reporters Without Borders states that, "Matias was kidnapped as he left the newspaper to go home on the evening of 25th October. His abductors beat him and terrorised him for hours, simulating an execution, asking him how he preferred to die and variously threatening to drag him along the ground behind their car, cut off his genitals, rape him or behead him. They also threatened his family members, saying they had been 'located'."

"He was released the next morning some 30km outside Oaxaca in Tlacolula de Matamoros, without his car and without his papers, which his abductors also took from him."

This is not the first attack against *Noticias* or its reporters, which for several years has been the lone local mainstream media outlet which is critical of the state government. Mexico is also the most deadly country in the Americas for journalists.

Earlier this year, on 16th January, two *Noticias* reporters received death threats from Ruben Marmolejo Maldonado, also known as 'El Dragon', a leader of *porros* (paid thugs), who has instigated numerous conflicts on the campus of the state university in Oaxaca (UABJO) as well as organising attacks against the APPO (Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca). He has been denounced by the Chair of the Law and Social Sciences Departments of UABJO of working for the state government.

Scott Campbell

## Notes from the United States

A recent report has explained how rich supporters of both Obama and McCain are successfully circumventing campaign finance laws by giving tens of thousands of dollars to fund-raising committees which benefit the candidates as well as the parties they represent. Many donors gave upwards of \$25,000 (£13,000) to the candidates' main joint fund-raising committees. The largest amounts of money (for both candidates) has been from the financial sector – including from the bosses at various firms involved in the current financial crisis such as Bear Stearns,

Lehman Brothers and AIG. In total each candidate has had received 2,000 contributions of \$25,000 or more into his joint fund-raising committees. These sums far exceed what the law allows an individual to contribute.

More specifically, the recently 'nationalised' mortgage company, Freddie Mac, paid a Republican consulting firm, DCI of Washington, \$2m (£1m) to oppose legislative rules and regulations that would have limited the mortgage finance giant and its sister company, Fannie Mae's, ability to do the harm

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## INTERNATIONAL

# Internet shackled in Australia

Controversial reforms by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and his labour party could see Australians banned from thousands of websites in a move which critics say is tantamount to the infamous censorship of the Chinese government.

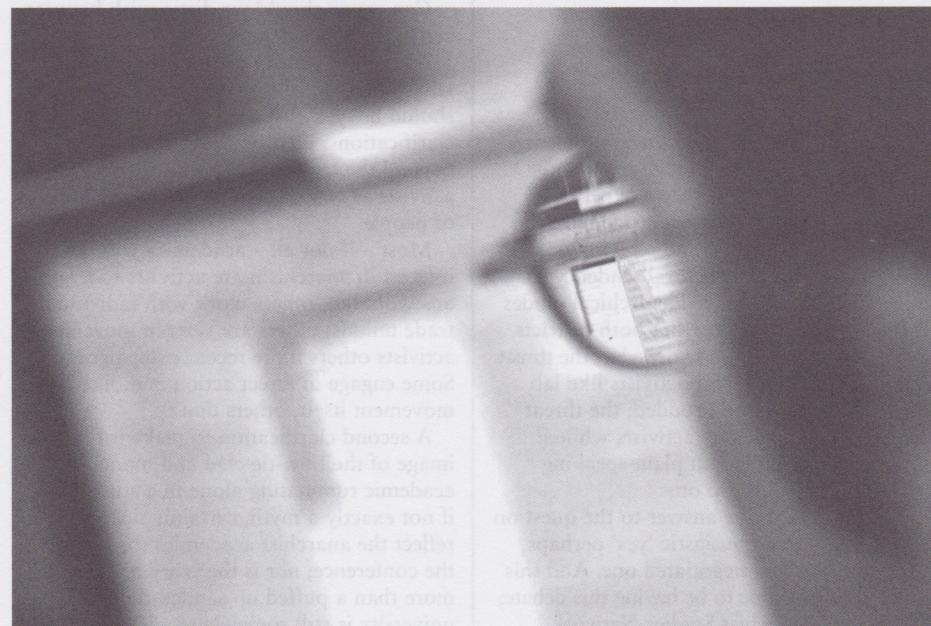
The measure, which is intended to block state-defined 'illegal' websites from casual browsers, has brought down a firestorm of criticism from free speech advocacy groups, online advocates and even businesses, who have been spooked by estimates that net speed would decrease by up to 20% as Internet Service Providers deal with monitoring and blocking millions.

In an early example of mission creep, some politicians have already called for the chastity belt to be tightened so it includes gambling and hardcore porn sites (which are legal in Australia), while others have asked for drug-related pages to be stricken from the list. In a bizarre twist, sites on anorexia and euthanasia could also be listed.

The idea has appalled many observers, who say that the nature of such blocking systems often allows for both unintentional and intentional blocking of sites which break no laws at all. Political websites have repeatedly fallen victim to such filters.

Others have pointed out that the system will be easy to break – needing only the use of a proxy (a masking IP address which allows users to pretend to be from elsewhere) to be bypassed. As a result, anyone engaged in illegal activities will have no problem outwitting it, and only casual browsers will find their surfing censored.

The Rudd government – lauded as a step to the left after years of hard-right control – previously attempted to introduce the system as a voluntary measure, spending \$100m



developing and marketing it to the population. Around 144,000 people took it up, a factor which civil libertarians point to as ample evidence that the population at large does not want restricted access.

Recent polls have appeared to bear this view out, with online polls seeing up to 88% disapproval for the measure.

Rudd has already run into trouble in the senate, with politicians of all parties declaring opposition.

The news comes as various online companies launch a manifesto for online freedom, which they say boils down to a policy of "resisting efforts by governments that seek to enlist companies in acts of censorship and

surveillance". A spokesperson said the initiative would see online groups giving only minimal aid to state requests for information, and only when legally bound to do so under international law.

However the measure has been ridiculed by some commentators, as three of the largest signees, Google, Yahoo and Microsoft, have already been involved in helping to build or maintain the 'great firewall of China', a censoring system which bans Chinese citizens from sites linked to internal dissidents, the outlawed Falun Gong spiritual movement, the Tibetan government-in-exile and those with information on the 1989 Tiananmen massacre.

## Notes from the United States

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they have in the sub-prime mortgages crisis. DCI's chief executive, Doug Goodyear, was subsequently hired by McCain's campaign to manage the Republican National Convention this last September. Goodyear later resigned from that post after it was revealed that he had lobbied for the military junta in Burma.

Outside dodgy campaign donations, as was evident at the last two elections, rigging the vote is also widespread. Early voting began in mid October. On the very first day there were reports of electronic voting machines reversing voters' choices.

New York University professor Mark Crispin Miller, author of *Loser Take All: Election Fraud and the Subversion of Democracy* comments: "This is something that we saw in at least eleven states in the 2004 election, hundreds and hundreds of people coming forward to say, 'I pushed the button for Kerry, and the button for Bush lit up'."

- Meanwhile the State's grip on any kind of dissent tightens. The Maryland State Police has now confirmed its classification of 53 non-violent activists as terrorists. Their names and personal information have been entered into state and federal databases that track terrorism suspects. And all in the open: Maryland state police superintendent, Terrence B. Sheridan, admitted that a surveillance operation, which targeted opponents of the death penalty and the Iraq war, was far more extensive than was known when its existence was disclosed in July.

The former state police superintendent who authorised the operation, Thomas E. Hutchins, defended the programme in a recent testimony, saying the programme was a "bulwark against potential violence" and called the activists "fringe people ... I don't believe the First Amendment is any guarantee to those who wish to disrupt the government."

— Louis Further

## Italian school protests escalate

Protest against government cuts in school and university research funding has escalated, with mass street demonstrations and occupations spreading across the country. Massive protests are taking place in many Italian cities and towns against Berlusconi's school reforms, which consist of cuts in public university and research funds, the introduction of student behaviour evaluation and the class separation of foreign and the Italian students.

For almost a month throughout Italy, high schools and universities have been occupied by students and teachers, and lessons are taking place outdoors. Massive street protests have disrupted the normal functioning of the cities. The demonstrations are growing, and the trend is expected to continue next month.

There was an assault on the Roma Film Festival as Al Pacino arrived, and primary school children have also joined the protest.

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## FEATURE

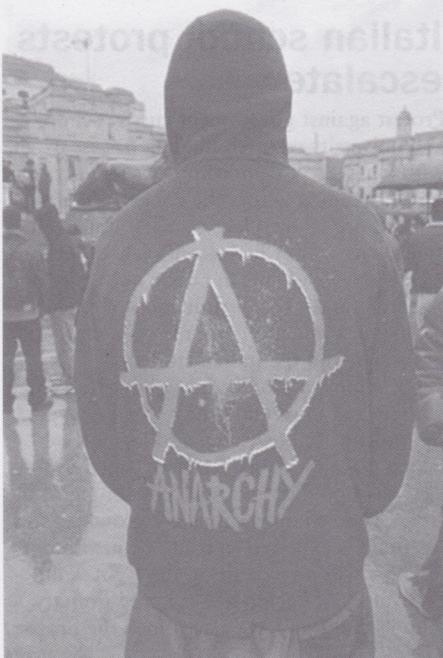
# Can activists and academics work together?

**Alex Prichard makes the case**

Most would say ‘no!’, and there are plenty of reasons for this: they range from anti-intellectualism to the negative experiences some have of some Marxist academics; the perception of academia and all who work in it as bourgeois; the structural tendency for universities to reproduce hierarchical modes of teaching and learning that both restricts access and commodifies knowledge; the threat that academics will treat activists like lab rats to be studied and prodded; the threat that jargon will alienate activists while it insulates academics from plain-speaking activist critique, and so on.

Still, we believe the answer to the question is ‘yes’ – not an enthusiastic ‘yes’ perhaps, but a cautious and negotiated one. And this is also the right time to be having this debate, because the Anarchist Studies Network recently held a conference at Loughborough University to which 140 academic anarchists and non-academic activists turned up to discuss and debate 75 individual and collective contributions.

It was a huge success, but many worried about the potential of the group to fly off into some ivory tower and leave the wider movement out. Let’s not kid ourselves here: the movement has never had a coherent academic ‘wing’, and it has survived without one. On the back of this surge in the confidence of academics to debate their anarchist politics and start publishing more widely on the subject, perhaps now is also a time to reflect on the place of academics within the wider movement.



Can we or should we distinguish between activists and academics?

But before we can get into the reasons why we believe the answer to the question should be ‘yes’, we need to make a couple of clarifications. First of all we need to get beyond the tendency to see academics and activists as two distinct and exclusive bunches of people.

Most – if not all – academics with an interest in anarchism are activists too. Some are Wobblies, others work with individual trade unions; others are veteran movement activists others more recent campaigners. Some engage in direct action and, like in the movement itself, others don’t.

A second clarification to make is that the image of the bow-tie-clad and monocled academic ruminating alone in a stuffy room, if not exactly a myth, certainly does not reflect the anarchist academics that came to the conference; nor is the ivory tower much more than a puffed up sandcastle. The university is still somewhere where learning, teaching and research is at the forefront of activities and this ought to be appreciated as an ideal even if the current institutionalisation of the ideal is less than perfect.

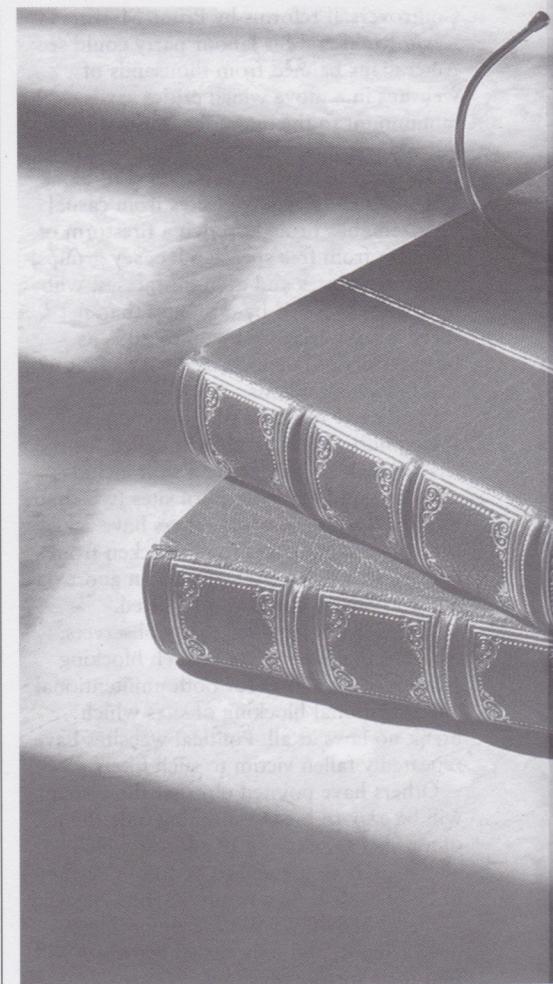
Furthermore, academics are all employed workers who suffer as much from the liberalisation of the economy and the precariousness this brings as others, but perhaps earn relatively more. Some (though relatively few) anarchist academics are persecuted by the state and/or their employers; anarchist oriented PhD students almost always find it extremely difficult to justify what they do to funding bodies and institutional superiors, and everyone hates what the commercialisation of education is doing to the structures of knowledge-production in the UK and abroad. In fact, a lot of this stuff informs the politics and principles of anarchist academics.

### For ‘Anarchademics’

With these clarifications in mind I think there are a few good reasons why anarchist activists and anarchist academics need one other. The first is this: we can learn from one another. Uri Gordon’s *Anarchy Alive! Antiauthoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (Pluto, 2007) is stellar proof of this. Gordon’s book shows us, yet again, that real, practical and movement-oriented anarchist theory almost always emerges directly out of the cauldron of activism – not from the academy.

Gordon’s book has some historical blind-spots, but it’s a valuable and important contribution to contemporary anarchism precisely because, alongside the fact that Gordon gained his DPhil from Oxford, he is also a veteran campaigner with all sorts of direct action, community and academic groups.

Collectively anarchademics (a term coined by Gordon) in the UK and elsewhere are

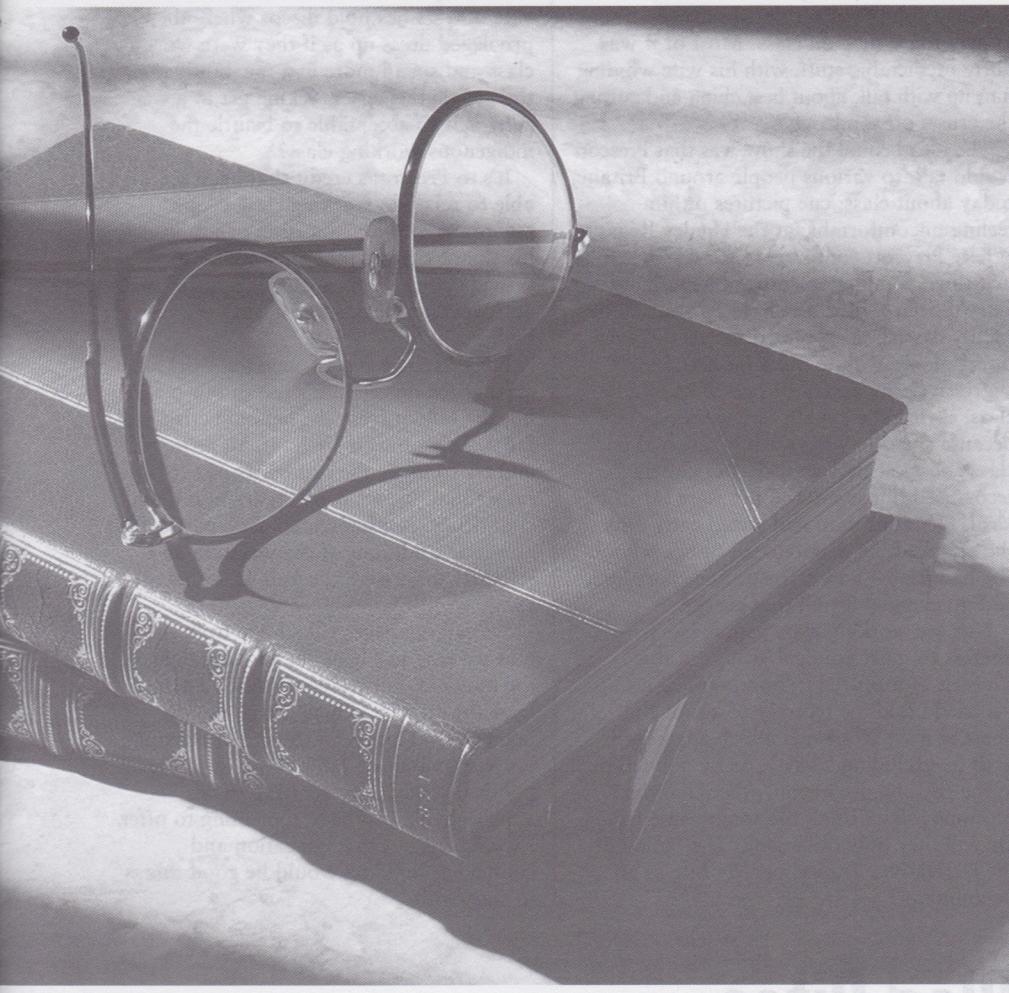


organising through the Anarchist Studies Network. This group can help coordinate and generate intellectual and practical enthusiasm for anarchist ideas both within the academy and beyond. The group is also concerned that its membership is overly filled with academic anarchists. This is not a huge problem – even academics need mutual aid networks – but the potential to become disengaged from the movement is something most worry about.

The ASN is a Political Studies Association (UK) specialist group for the study of anarchism. As a group we have organised three meetings, four mini-conferences, a joint conference with the ‘Network of Activist Scholars in Politics and International Relations’ (NASPIR), and one large stand alone-event this September. We have a small budget that we use predominantly to get people together rather than fund pet projects. So the bulk of our funding goes towards getting anarchist academics and other interested parties together.

This has helped us build a sense of community and mutual aid which was one of the explicit aims of the group from its inception (all the details can be found on our website, anarchist-studies-network.org.uk). We hope this group goes from strength to

# Work together?



strength, but for this to be meaningful we need to start a discussion and involve non-academic anarchists.

Activists and academics can also tell each other where they're going wrong if and when a real debate gets going. This demands a forum where this debate can take place and a language that's non-alienating. While specialist languages are at the core of all communities, academics have a tendency towards jargon if all they do is speak to other academics.

If they were encouraged to make their points in plain English by a supportive but critical audience, then that would be positive critical engagement. If activists and academics saw the process of learning as being a two-way street, then reports, pamphlets and academic papers can be used by everyone in a spirit of conviviality and mutual support. This would help avoid activists being turned into 'lab rats' – fears that many might rightly have – and academics being conceived as out of touch.

How we produce knowledge is as important as why. So we also need to recognise that academia first and foremost produces knowledge. Making sure that the students, who are increasingly just fed in at one end of the

machine, stripped of their cash and spat out the other, get a rounded political education is vital.

Student groups were often prominent in the revolutionary impulse – charged with new and vitalising ideas. Throughout the twentieth century students have sought radical alternatives, but rarely gained the critical mass to truly challenge the mainstream consensus. A new spirit of mutual aid between anarchist activists and academics, students and workers, and recognition that the categories are never self-evidently distinct, would be worthwhile.

We could also do worse than recall George Bernard Shaw's maxim. He famously argued that "those who can, do; those who can't, teach". Typically the saying "those who can't, teach" is used as an insult, but the point remains – consciousness-raising can be done by deed, but it will be fleeting if it's not backed up by thoughtful and lasting argument.

Secondly, and related to this, academics can dedicate time to problems and can reflect on movement activities away from the cut and thrust of daily political struggle. This is a privilege that's worth exploiting. This sort of removed reflection is vital if the movement is to learn from itself rather than having a constant barrage of negative press and critique from those who know nothing of the movement.

There have been academic courses and research papers that have reflected on the periodic upsurges in anarchist social movements, but to ensure that the stuff that's written is from within the movement, academics and activists need to talk to and respect one another and anarchademics need the respect they deserve for walking a difficult line. Debate and disagreement are fine, but infighting that paralyses the movement is a waste of time. Constructive discussions are vital in order to make sure we speak for ourselves with conviction, rather than have our voices colonised by a dismissive mainstream.

Finally, there are already non-academic radical or anarchist history groups in Bristol, London and elsewhere. Non-academic anarchists have been writing about the movement for as long as the movement has existed and most grass roots radical movements generate their own analytical papers – anarchist academics are the newcomers. Groups like the Institute for Anarchist Studies in Canada rightly pride themselves for funding projects completely independently of the academic mainstream. The dead old guys were not academics (with the exception perhaps of Kropotkin) and most anarchist movements have been organic responses, not to academic pamphlets, but to real social pressures and changes.

Still, this produces something of a problem for the movement, because with anarchist activists visible on the news media and in social groups and wider political communities, and no one in the mainstream of society providing a strong and principled defence of anarchism as political theory and practice, the message will be lost under a torrent of fear-induced wailing about anarchy and chaos.



## COMMENT

### ABOUT FREEDOM

#### ANGEL ALLEY

So the Royal Mail's under attack again. *Freedom* ran a lengthy series last year about the background of deceit, kow-towing to neo-liberalism and EU shenanigans which preceded and dictated this outcome, and warned at the time that the capitulation by the CWU would only lead to more in the future. And so it has come to pass.

I'm making another prediction today. If unions – and workforces – continue down this path of begging for more and using the strike as a protest rather than a weapon, the working class will lose millions more in pay and hundreds of thousands more unionists.

We're about to go through one of the nastiest periods of downturn we have ever seen, and the working class is at its least organised for a hundred years or more. If we don't abandon this attitude of asking nicely, pretty please, for bottom-line capitalists to do us a favour and pay us properly, this is going to hurt. A lot.

On that cheery note then, I hope you enjoy the issue! As always, we're looking for helping getting the paper out, getting information in, etc., etc. Contacts to the address below.

Rob Ray

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#### CONTACT DETAILS

Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX  
Tel/fax: 020 7247 9249  
[www.freedompress.org.uk](http://www.freedompress.org.uk)  
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#### NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 25th November 2008 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 16th November. You can send your articles to us by email to [copy@freedompress.org.uk](mailto:copy@freedompress.org.uk) or by post addressed to 'The Editors', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

# A sideways look

by SVARTFROSK

Sometimes there's a programme on television that confounds your prejudices. Last week I watched John Prescott doing that very thing in his programme on class. Most of it was fairly predictable stuff, with his wife winding him up with talk about best china and cutting the crusts off sandwiches.

The idea behind the show was that Prescott would talk to various people around Britain today about class: cue pictures of him feeling uncomfortable at the Henley Regatta. Where Prescott confounded me was when he met three young women from Lewisham. They'd been trailed as 'chavs', a concept he rightly described as a horrible term. Of the three, one was more talkative and almost aggressive. She described herself as middle class, saying she couldn't be working class because she didn't have a job! She had no class consciousness as such, but clearly recognised things around her were far from ideal. Her education had ended early after she attacked the deputy head of her school. She had it all – anger, frustration, boredom, and no channel for all that energy.

Nor are working class people like her of interest to most political groups in this country. Nor indeed to non-political groups – a friend told me recently of a folk club opening near Woolwich which advertised itself as excluding 'chavs'. As he pointed out in the ensuing discussion, where did the precious folkies think the songs came from? Or will they only be singing 'The Ballad of the Derivatives Trader' or 'My Life as an Accountant'?

## Blog Bites

She has done it again! Surely David Cameron's shadow security minister and foreign policy adviser Dame Pauline Neville-Jones deserves a Queen's award for industry, or something, for her apparent ability to attract big money and win the confidence of important overseas contacts?

In these economically troubled times when local authorities have lost millions in collapsing Icelandic banks, and people face losing their jobs, homes and pensions, we need a good tonic in the shape of High Society news. That is presumably why Gordon Brown brought back Peter, now Lord, Mandelson. No sooner is he installed as Business secretary than lines are buzzing about his meetings with Oleg Deripaska, Russia's billionaire aluminium king. Oh Lord! Mandy's old office in Brussels admits they met on 'social occasions', but says they never talked business.

Meanwhile Tory shadow chancellor George Osborne was being asked to say more about his meetings with Mr Deripaska, and to tell about his stay at the Corfu villa of Nathaniel Rothschild. David Cameron himself is being urged not to be shy about

Prince William and his mates at Sandhurst dressed up as 'chavs'. Public schools and elite universities hold discos where the privileged dress up as if they were working class and spend more in a few hours than the people they are mocking get in a week. Why is it so acceptable to belittle the indigenous working class?

It's to Prescott's credit that he is actually able to relate to working class people, regardless of their education or job. It is to his shame that he used that ability to provide political cover for one of the most anti-working class government's we've ever had.

But there is a crisis facing the working class at the moment. It's not of our making, but the fallout from the banking crisis will fall mainly on us if we let it. To respond, and try to make the capitalists pay for it rather than us, we need organisation, and confidence. Neither comes easy, particularly after our traditions of organisation and self-education were crushed or withered away.

We can, however, take hope from the fact that we may not have the tools to fight at the moment, but we do at least sometimes have the attitude. There are plenty of potential militants out there. For them to become anarchists rather than any other political persuasion, we have to be approachable and have something to offer. I would suggest that education and confidence building would be good things to start with.

(from [randompottins.blogspot.com](http://randompottins.blogspot.com))

his trips to see Rupert Murdoch aboard his yacht in the eastern Mediterranean.

When it comes to remunerative links, however, there is nothing like a Dame! Pauline Neville-Jones was chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee, met interesting leaders like Slobodan Milosevic at the Dayton peace talks on Bosnia and former Yugoslavia, and then joined NatWest markets. She helped arrange the privatisation of Serbia's telecoms industry, for which NatWest and its star employees were accordingly rewarded.

Dame Pauline went on to help guide the BBC through stormy times, but was reticent and modest about her role as a governor when director general Greg Dyke was fired, over the Kelly affair. Some people remarked about her £133,000 a year as chair of military hardware contractors QinetiQ.

But the enterprising Dame Pauline was able to pack in the BBC job and make much more by exercising her share option before QinetiQ was taken over by the US-based Carlyle Group. The National Audit Office reported that the British taxpayer received a raw deal. QinetiQ had been the MoD's

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## Internet censorship in public libraries

Svartfrost's ruminations on net censorship in public libraries (11th October) was an interesting piece, but one that rather overestimates the state's (at either national or local level) desire to control what people access on-line on library premises.

The prosaic reality is that no library workers have the time, interest or necessary skills to monitor all the possible web sites, message boards, social networking sites, and so forth that can be accessed from computers in libraries. Neither do their employers, the local council wish to necessarily censor for political or other content.

However, they are under pressure from above (i.e. the law) and below (local taxpayers) not to allow access to anything that might give useful information to terrorists (however defined) or organised criminals or anyone who might cause grave offense to others. Many public library systems therefore feel obliged to install the sort of netnanny software he mentions as a way of coping with the pressures, without incurring a vast expenditure of time and effort doing the necessary monitoring/blocking themselves.

The biggest purveyors of net monitoring and blocking software are based in the USA and by default, the software tends to block those sites deemed offensive or dangerous to 'middle' America (or at least the most vocal and best organised sections thereof.)

Consequently many British libraries find themselves blocking access to sites, such as the recent case in Birmingham where secularist and pagan sites were blocked, without often realising it or intending to do so. When such innocuous sites are found to be blocked they are usually unblocked quite quickly with apologies all round, so it pays to complain if any site you want to access is blocked.

The local library staff may not, of course, be able to unblock it themselves – they may lack the necessary authorisation, or skills to

## Blog bites

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Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). But Dame Pauline got some top level US conference engagements for her diary, and David Cameron decided she was just the person to advise him on foreign affairs.

Now the Dame is in the news again with a report linking her office indirectly to a Ukrainian oligarch called Dmitry Firtash.

Pauline Neville-Jones, shadow security minister, former chair of the joint intelligence committee and a key Cameron foreign policy adviser, currently has her office sponsored by Robert Shetler-Jones, a close associate of the foreign billionaire Dmitry Firtash. A company linked to Shetler-Jones is also making payments to Conservative Central Office. It is called Scythian Ltd. Shetler-Jones chairs and part owns it.

do so – so a letter to an elected representative, head of library service, not to mention the local press may do the trick. Assuming that is that you want them to know that you are interested in accessing such sites. (Not always advisable!)

Mal Function

## Group living is an evolutionary success story

During his usual distortions of my argument, Peter Gibson proclaims himself a "mad bad boy" (letters, 27th September). This seems correct as his letter is a rant (mad) and inaccurate (bad)!

Apparently he has "rehabilitated the sociobiologists" whom, he claims, are "now the good guys". Rehabilitated for whom? The world? Anarchists? *Freedom* readers? Me? Not the last, as my reading of sociobiologists predates his letters. Not to mention that his increasingly bizarre letters were provoked by my review of a sociobiologist who got Kropotkin wrong. So just like any group of experts, sociobiologists can be wrong and, more importantly, unthinkingly reflect the biases of the dominant culture while proclaiming their scientific impartiality.

Gibson proclaims that I consider sociobiologists to be "the defenders of altruism, cooperation and society". Given that many of them have been studying how to explain all these in terms of evolutionary theory, this is more than my mere opinion! Richard Dawkins, for example, shows why co-operation serves an evolutionary purpose, arguing that "gene selfishness can translate itself into individual altruism" and so the selfish gene does not exclude, and in fact can encourage, what he calls "mutualistic co-operation" or the "evolution of associations of mutual benefit".

But, apparently, our 'mad bad boy' knows better than Dawkins. These are "rehabilitated sociobiologists" whose "prestigious and well paid university posts" stop them agreeing with him on what "selfish gene theory" really means! Apparently, "if sociobiologists took their ideas seriously rather than their jobs and public image, they might realise that society and selfish genes are incompatible". In other words, Dawkins selfishness for wanting his "prestigious and well paid" job ensures he ignores his own selfish genes. Oops!

And 'society' seems to be a bit of a bugbear for our 'neo-crypto-sociobiologist'. If he actually read Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* he would discover that most animals, including ourselves, have always existed in groups and societies. As leading primatologist Frans de Waal notes, we "descend from a long line of group-living primates". There was never a point at which we decided to become social, we come from highly social ancestors who, as with most other creatures, lived in groups. This was not an option, such mutual aid was an essential survival strategy.

So much for Gibson's "make believe of

## LETTERS AND COMMENT

society"! Perhaps he should consult Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* on this? I should also point out that de Waal states that Kropotkin "rightly noted that many animals survive not through struggle, but through mutual aid". So it appears that when Gibson proclaims that "we are like all animals, we are animals" and "we need to recognise that we behave in the same way as other animals" he excludes any co-operative and mutualistic behaviour they show!

Apparently I want "to believe" that "really deep down" that we "love each other". Since I have continually denied this, I can only conclude that Gibson subscribes to the notion that a lie becomes the truth if repeated enough. As Kropotkin noted, "it is not love, and not even sympathy" which causes animals to assist one another, but rather a more hard-nosed recognition that it is in their own interests for survival to do so, not to mention "the joys they can find in social life". Gibson simply cannot understand the concept of mutual aid, for if he did then he quickly realises that sociobiologists have shown how being "concerned only with number one" (in the narrow sense he subscribes to) is not a good idea. If he bothered to read the chapter 'Nice guys finish first' of Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene*, he will discover both why animals "prosper from mutual co-operation" and why internally competitive groups "will be more likely subsequently to go extinct. There can therefore be a kind of higher-level ... selection in favour of reciprocal altruism." This confirms Kropotkin's argument.

He claims that I think "that aberrant capitalists are the problem", but in fact society "is capitalism" and "all of us [are] selfish capitalists". The confusions in this are so obvious that they do not need refuting. As for his claim that "selfish gene theory would now appear to be very acceptable as long as it is kept out of politics", well, I would take it more seriously if he showed even a basic understanding of that theory. Gibson clearly is still confused between the selfish gene (the replicator) and a selfish individual (the vehicle), that 'selfish' in terms of genes is purely a metaphor and does not automatically equate to 'selfish' individuals or actions. Selfish genes, like individuals and groups, can best flourish by means of co-operative activity by individual animals and this in line with Kropotkin's arguments and evidence.

He ends by self-contradictorily proclaiming that "animals that have survived the longest have gabbed the least" and that "all this chatter which we see as thinking is an attempt to manipulate others for our own benefit. Language is exploitative". Ah, you see, those animals which communicate ("manipulate others for [their] own benefit") least have "survived the longest", yet animals have "survived as long as they have" because "they must have been concerned only with number one"!

Gibson states "we are not thinking, our genes are talking". I can concur that he is not thinking. I'm not sure whether it is his genes who are talking, but the noises are definitely coming from the back of his jeans!

Iain McKay

## GETTING ACTIVE

### PRISON NEWS

Thomas Meyer-Falk parole campaign Thomas has been imprisoned since 1996 on a sentence of 15 years 9 months for trying to raise money for both legal and illegal left wing projects by robbing a bank. Because of his strong beliefs, he's been subject to very harsh repression. In May 2007 his solitary confinement was lifted after 11 years and he can only now participate in education and other activities. In Germany prisoners may be considered for release after having served two-thirds of their sentence. This was on November 2007. The courts are investigating whether they will grant Thomas parole so supporters are asked to write to the courts in support of his release. A sample letter is below"

*Seht geehrter Richter Kleinheinz,  
Hiermit unterstuetze ich den Antrag von  
Herrn Thomas Meyer-Falk nach der gesetzlich  
vorgesehenen Verbuessung von 2/3 seiner  
Strafe freigelassen zu werden. Freiheit fuer  
Thomas!*

Hochachtungsvoll  
(your signature)

- All letters in support of Thomas being granted parole are to be mailed to:  
Vorsitzender Richter Kleinheinz, c/o Landgericht, Hans-Thomas-Str. 7, D-76133 Karlsruhe, Germany.
- To write to Thomas: Thomas Meyer-Falk, c/o JVA Bruchsal, Schoenbornstr. 32, 76646 Bruchsal, Germany  
See freedom-for-thomas.de for more.

Campaign builds around Lex Wotton Activists have called a campaign to fight against a guilty verdict handed down to aboriginal activist Lex Wotton for 'rioting with destruction'. He is facing a sentence of up to life in prison after being arrested for his alleged role as ringleader of a riot which broke out in 2004, over the death in custody of Mulrunji Doomadgee, a 36-year-old Palm Island man who had been arrested for public nuisance.

Mulrunji died on the floor of his police cell, a victim of massive internal injuries, including a ruptured spleen, four broken ribs and a liver that had been "almost cleaved in two" from a huge compressive force. A subsequent inquest found that Snr Sgt Hurley was responsible for the death. The community erupted on 26th November, a week later, after they were told that the pathologist's report had found Mulrunji's death was an accident. The death outraged the local aboriginal community, who called for a demonstration, which ended in violence and the burning of the police station, courthouse, a police residence and a vehicle.

Lex's wife, Cecilia, and his children were helped from the courtroom by friends. They sobbed outside as a crowd of around 20 supporters looked on in stunned silence.

After several years of fully paid leave while awaiting trial on manslaughter charges (where he was acquitted) Snr Sgt Hurley has since been promoted to Police Inspector.  
email freelexwotton@gmail.com



● Hackney Solidarity Network has called an 'emergency' meeting for all Hackney activists to discuss what people Hackney need to do in response to the recent developments in capitalism including declining share values, increased state debt, price reductions, increased mortgage rates, price increases of food and fuel and so on.

An organiser said: "It is clear we will have a period of high(er) unemployment, housing repossession, empty flats, cuts in wages, cuts in council spending, pension shortfalls, increases in BNP support and so on, that will impact seriously and negatively on the lives of the majority of people in Hackney. So should we be defensive in this period or should we go on the offensive?"

The event will be held at the Moth Club, Valette Street, London, at 7.30pm Tuesday 11th November.

● Activists from Earth First! halted the continuing destruction of countryside at Shipley in Derbyshire by UK Coal at the end of last month (pictured). The action is part of an ongoing campaign against UK Coal's plans to open-cast mine 1 million tonnes of coal from the site, over the next five years. They plan to release 3.5 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere over this period.

The protesters entered the site around 1pm this afternoon and brought work to an end whilst they peacefully occupied machinery. They intend to stay for as long as possible.

● A price reduction campaign has had its first informal meeting in London, aiming to build a network of people who will go into supermarkets and other retailers to force supermarkets to reduce their prices through mass haggling campaigns.

The initiative, which was discussed at the Anarchist Bookfair in London last month, would see leafleting campaigns to alert people

to an action, then two people with clear demands would negotiate, with several follow-up options if they are unsuccessful. email: pricereductioncampaign@riseup.net

● An anti-capitalist feminist event is being organised for 14th February next year, aiming to bring a grassroots approach to feminist activism. The organisers are aiming to bring in a wide selection of groups to kick off the Gender, Race, Class event, including activists from Unity in Catford, the Anarcha-Fem Kollectiv, Black Women's Rape Action Project, the English Collective of Prostitutes, Feminist Activist Forum, Feminist Fightback, Left Women's Network, London Pro-Feminist Men's Group, London Third Wave Feminists, Permanent Revolution, Women Against Rape, and Workers Liberty.

An organiser wrote: "We don't want to just talk about our politics – we want to fight to actually change the material conditions of women's lives, to fight misogyny and our own exploitation, and to involve as many women and men as possible in the campaigns that will be at the centre of this event."

● A campaign has been launched to support seven sacked workers at Ikea in Brescia, Italy, after they were fired during a management changeover after lengthy disputes over unsafe working conditions and poor pay.

The anarcho-syndicalist USI-AIT union have thrown their support behind the seven, and have joined them in weekly pickets outside the company's Brescia offices for over a month.

The union are asking for solidarity actions to be taken at Ikea shops, and for faxes to be sent to Ikea Italia 0039029297330 and to Ikea Brescia 00390302788207 demanding the seven be reinstated on full contract status.

# Buenaventura Durruti

## A biography of the Spanish anarchist and Civil War fighter by Joe King

Durruti was born the son of a railway worker on 14th July 1896 in Leon, Spain. At the age of 14 he left school to become a trainee mechanic in the railway yard. Like his father, he joined the socialist UGT union. He took an active part in the strike of August 1917 when the government overturned an agreement between the union and the employers. This soon became a general strike throughout the area. The government brought in the army and within three days the strikers had been crushed.

Government troops killed 70 and wounded 500 workers. Two thousand strikers were jailed. Durruti managed to escape to France, where he came into contact with exiled anarchists, whose influence led to him joining the anarchist CNT union on his return in January 1919. He joined the fight against dictatorial employers in the Asturian mines and was arrested in March 1919. He escaped, and over the next decade and a half he threw himself into activity for the CNT and the anarchist movement.

These years see him involved in several strikes and being forced into exile. Unwittingly the Spanish government 'exported' rebellion, as Durruti, and his close friend Francisco Ascaso, happily joined the struggle for freedom wherever they ended up, in both Europe and Latin America. In 1931 the Spanish monarchy fell, and Durruti moved to Barcelona with his French companion Emilienne. Here he joined the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), and together with other militants they formed the 'Nosotros' group. These were members within the CNT of a radical tendency that harboured no illusions about the recently proclaimed Republic, maintaining that the moment was ripe for continued progress towards a social revolution.

With the electoral victory by the liberal/reformist Popular Front in February 1936, Left and Right were on a collision course, accelerated by Franco's military rebellion on 19th July that year. The CNT and the FAI confronted the army with organisation and mass mobilisations: the Spanish Revolution. They triumphed in much of Spain despite the fascists' superiority in weapons and resources. The anarchist contribution was decisive in resisting the fascists throughout the country, and in Catalonia defeated the rebels single-handedly, Durruti being one of the boldest fighters in this battle. On 24th July, from Barcelona where the anarchist goal of workers' control, direct democracy and liberty was starting to become a reality, Durruti left with an armed column towards



fascist-occupied Zaragoza. Through tough battles, this workers' militia advanced and saved the Aragon front against better equipped regular troops.

Parallel to this, the anarchist forces supported a social transformation which meant the establishment of agricultural collectives in Aragon, upsetting the authoritarians of the Communist and Socialist parties, according to whom the war could not be won with the revolution going on. War or no war, these would-be-rulers would never have liked a real workers' democracy.

Following the liberation of Aragon, Durruti was interviewed by Pierre van Passen of the *Toronto Star*. "For us" said Durruti, "it is a matter of crushing fascism once and for all. Yes, and in spite of the government. No government in the world fights fascism to the death."

When the bourgeoisie see power slipping from its grasp, it has recourse to fascism to maintain itself. The Liberal government of Spain could have rendered the fascist elements powerless long ago. Instead it compromised and dallied. Even now at the moment there are men in this government who want to go easy on the rebels.

Here Durruti laughed: "You can never tell, you know, the present government might yet need these rebellious forces to crush the workers' movement ... We know what we want. To us it means nothing that there is a Soviet Union somewhere in the world, for the sake of whose peace and tranquillity the workers of Germany and China were sacrificed

to fascist barbarians by Stalin. We want revolution here in Spain, right now, not maybe after the next European war.

"We are giving Hitler and Mussolini far more worry with our revolution than the whole Red Army of Russia. We are setting an example to the German and Italian working class how to deal with fascism."

But, interjected van Passen, even if you win "you will be sitting on a pile of ruins". Durruti answered: "We have always lived in slums and holes in the wall. We will know how to accommodate ourselves for a while. For, you must not forget, we also know how to build. It is we the workers who built these palaces and cities, here in Spain and in America and everywhere."

"We, the workers, can build others to take their place, and better ones! We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the earth, there is not the slightest doubt about that. The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world, here, in our hearts. That world is growing this minute."

On 15th November 1936, Durruti arrived with a force of 1,800 men to reinforce the defence of Madrid. On the 19th, he was struck by a bullet, and he died at dawn on the 20th. He was buried two days later at Montjuich's cemetery in Barcelona, his coffin accompanied by 500,000 people carrying the red and black flags of anarchism. It was the largest funeral cortège ever seen in that city.

## REVIEWS

### WHAT'S ON NOVEMBER

until 9th London Transgender Film Festival at Ritzy Picturehouse, Coldharbour Lane, London SW2 1JG and B3 Media, Electric Avenue Studios, 3b Electric Avenue, London SW9 8JY, see [transgenderfilmfestival.co.uk](http://transgenderfilmfestival.co.uk) for details.

10th Remembering Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Nine – on the 13th anniversary of the 1995 murders by the Nigerian state, with Shell in close cahoots, we will be remembering what they fought for and what they died for, hearing about people's resistance around the world to Shell's chase for ever-greater profits, showing the films *Those Who Dance and Shadows and Light: Oil, Power, and the Niger Delta*, along with art, poetry and performance from 7.30 until 10pm at LARC, 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1 1ES, for more see [londonarc.org](http://londonarc.org), [artnotoil.org.uk](http://artnotoil.org.uk) or [rememberingsarowiw.com](http://rememberingsarowiw.com)

19th London Anarchist Forum symposium on Prison Abolition plus open discussion at Rampart Centre 15–17 Rampart Street, London E1 2LA at 7pm, call 07981 900563, email [antines@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:antines@yahoo.co.uk) or see [eventsandissues.bravehost.com](http://eventsandissues.bravehost.com) for more.

22nd Southampton Go Green Fair with stalls, food, workshops, kid's activities, facepainting, talks, films and more, at Avenue St Andrews Church, The Avenue, Southampton, Hampshire, SO17 1XQ from 10am until 4pm.

29th and 30th Anti-war gathering, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly are meeting in Edinburgh – let's crash their party, see <http://edinantimil.livejournal.com> for more.

29th Chomsky at 80, a day of workshops and discussions with speakers including David Miller of Strathclyde University, Milan Rai, anti-war activist and editor of *Peace News*, and Leo Murray of Plane Stupid, at Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester, see [chomskyat80.org.uk](http://chomskyat80.org.uk)

29th Climate Camp Cymru meeting to discuss the possibility of having a camp for climate action or other types of events in Wales, at Quaker Meeting House, Dean Street, Bangor, from 10am until 5pm, email [bangor@lists.riseup.net](mailto:bangor@lists.riseup.net) for more.

### DECEMBER

1st Conference in celebration of Chomsky's 80th birthday on 7th December, speakers include Jonathan Steele, author *Defeat: Why They Lost Iraq*; Hilary Wainwright, author *Reclaim the State*, co-editor *Red Pepper*; Milan Rai, author *Chomsky's Politics*, co-editor *Peace News*, at Artworkers Guild Hall, 6 Queen Square, London WC1N 3AT, from 7.30pm, call 020 7278 3344 or see [j-n-v.org](http://j-n-v.org) or [peacenews.info](http://peacenews.info).

6th National Climate March, part of the Global Day of Climate Protest halfway through the UN Climate Talks in Poznan, an important chance to influence decision makers before the Copenhagen talks in 2009 – assemble Grosvenor Square, London W1 at 12 noon, for details call 020 7833 9311 or see [www.campaigncc.org](http://www.campaigncc.org)

## FILM

### Linha De Passe

directed by Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas (Brazil, 2008)

Salles reunites with long-term collaborator Thomas in the low-key social realism of early successes *Foreign Land* (1996) and *Central Station* (1999), which skilfully knit together narratives of everyday life in portraying the contemporary history of Brazil from the bottom-up. *Linha De Passe* is therefore an interesting contrast to both the director's recent films – *Behind The Sun*'s (2001) intense magical-realist village vendetta, the fluffy tourist portrayal of young Che in *Motorcycle Diaries* (2004), and the naff Japanese ghost-story remake *Dark Water* (2005) – as well as lurid contemporary stylisations of 'favela chic' in *City of God* (Fernando Meirelles, 2002), *City of Men* (Paolo Morelli, 2007) and *Elite Squad* (José Padilha, 2008). The new release combines true-life scenarios, sophisticated construction, inspired cinematography and editing, and sympathetic casting and direction to avoid the overblown grandiosities and simplistic social stasis of these other films, while exploring individuality and collectivity via twin metaphors of family and football to illuminate with great humility social complexity and potential. Moreover the title has several 'beautiful game' connotations – from 'keepy-uppy' and developing teamwork to a wider philosophy of transcendence – but a resolute refusal of 'Roy of the Rovers' clichés make this, to my mind, the best football film ever.

Single-matriarch cleaner Cleuza (a majestic Sandra Corveloni, best actress winner at Cannes) is pregnant by a fifth different absent father after another escape into drunken delirious fandom. She struggles to hold together four sons in a decrepit concrete shanty in São Paulo: Dario, the neighbourhood ball-playing genius, at eighteen too old to break into the minor leagues; Dinis, the womanising motorcycle courier, already with a child he can't support, who turns to violent car-crime; Dinho, the petrol-pump jockey looking to evangelical religion; and Reginaldo, the youngest, who truants on local buses searching for his Black father. The petty filial conflicts and fierce loyalty, oscillating between selfishness, spite and big-heartedness, of these young working-class men with few prospects beyond endless drudgery – but still varying measures of agency – are seamlessly interwoven so as to deny neither crushing frustration nor the stubborn intelligence, resourcefulness and determination of lower-class life. A homage to the Italian neorealist classic *Rocco and His Brothers* (Luchino Visconti, 1960), *Linha De Passe* thus trumps its negativity – though the fairytale denouement of Dario getting a break and scoring the winning goal is hedged with cautionary suspicion that the pervasive corruption of the sport's institutions will smother him. Meanwhile Cleuza gives birth screaming, Dinis decides he can't hack wrecking people's lives, Dinho assaults his boss, and diminutive Reginaldo drives away a bus in search of past, present and future ...



### QUIZ ANSWERS

- They are all member-owned clubs.
- There was a massive increase in the number being left at hospitals, with one father leaving 9 of his 10 children. A total of 14 were left in September, in a state with a population of just 1.7 million.
- Because the firm running it, Clarion, bought the arms industry fairs DSEi, ITEC and

- LAAD. When mums spotted this, they protested and Bounty and some other companies pulled out.
- All tried to assassinate Mussolini. Violet Gibson was released and spent the rest of her life in an English asylum. The 15 year old Zamboni was lynched by blackshirts and the other anarchists executed.

# Bottling the gene pool

**Jar City juggles the clichés of police procedurals and conventions from Icelandic myth to suggestively modern effect, finds Tom Jennings**

Mobilising the distinctive features of Iceland's insular history and comparatively recent breakneck modernisation, Baltasar Kormáur's *101 Reykjavík* (2000) cleverly spun indie cinema's staple of aimless slackers from dysfunctional families adrift in trendy youth culture. Heavily indebted to Pedro Almodóvar's subversions of social and sexual conformism in contemporary Spain, he has continued to mine the tragic farces of kinship in sundry genres – from *The Sea's* (2002) sins-of-the-patriarch saga to stock white-trash grifters in the over-Hollywoodised *A Little Trip to Heaven* (2005). Now, the debut's counterpointing of harsh Icelandic geography and the long-suffering travails of its inhabitants returns with a vengeance – both literally and metaphorically – in another crime thriller scenario in *Jar City*, based on a novel by Arnaldur Indridason. Here, however, while still brim-full of manipulative melodrama and mordant humour, there is also a recurring poignancy which transcends the director's earlier comic misanthropy – evoking empathy for otherwise thoroughly unlikeable characters whose misery seems both self-inflicted and pre-ordained.

The film's sense of stifling structural determination is enhanced by Bergsteinn Björðulfsson's alternately majestic aerial pans across the Arctic landscape (with dramatic choral score) and claustrophobic interior cinematography. We descend into this forbidding environment via a grotty urban basement with dour world-weary detective Erlendur (Ingvar Eggert Sigurdsson) expressing disgust at a "typical Icelandic murder – messy and pointless". Lonely lowlife lorry-driver Holberg's skull was caved in with his own ashtray, but the sole crime-scene clues are a penchant for porn and a decades-old photo of the grave of a child – whose later exhumation shows her brain removed before burial. Meanwhile genetic database administrator Örn (Atli Rafn Sigurdarson) obsessively mourns his young daughter succumbing to the same rare brain condition. These threads dovetail as the investigation implicates Holberg's old criminal muckers – but one (the country's "most notorious maniac") is now in prison and the other found hidden under Holberg's floor having been killed years earlier. Suspicions of their past sexual violence then also evaporate once a search for rape victims yields only Örn's mother disclosing hitherto concealed youthful indiscretions.



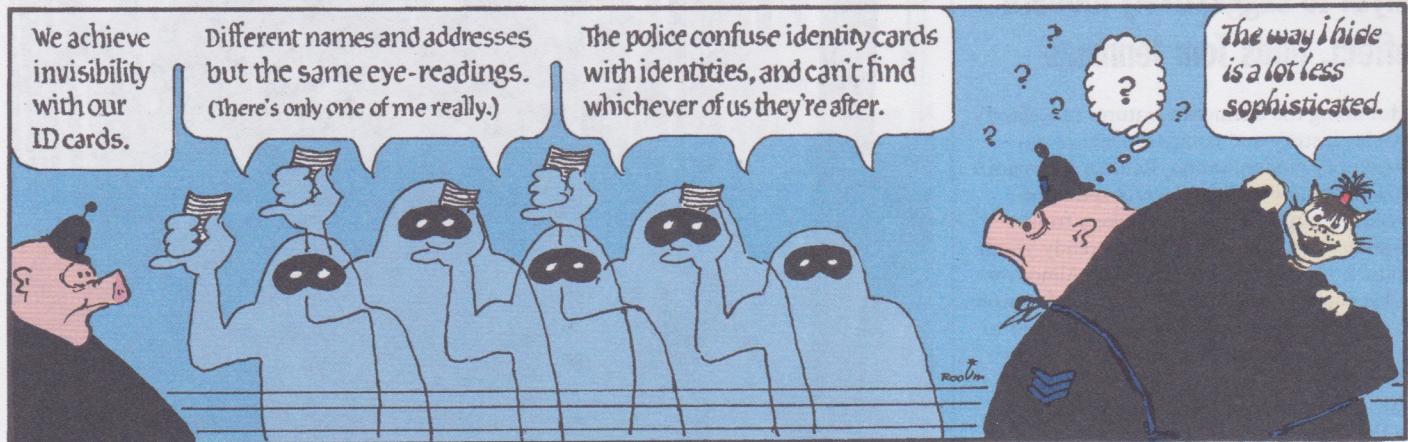
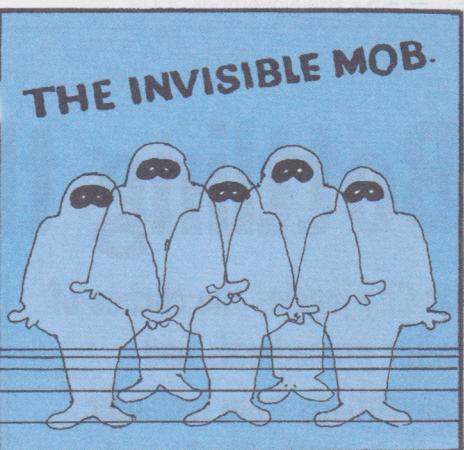
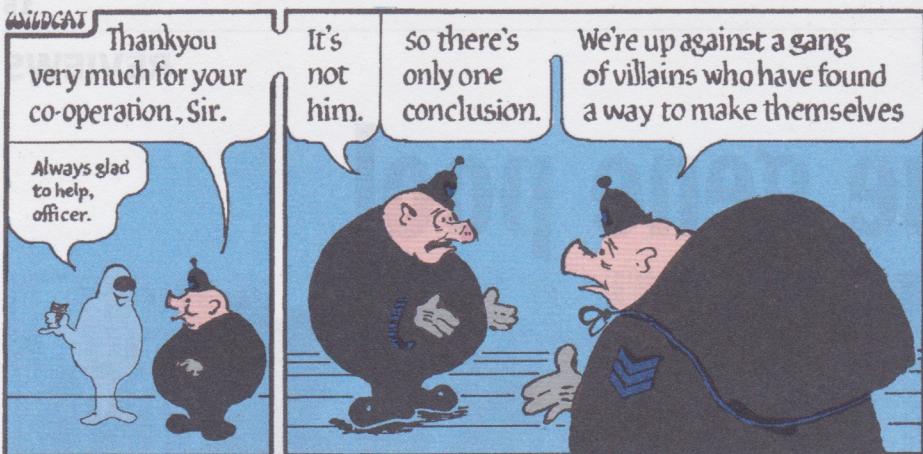
Realising Örn has independently pieced together his real parentage and killed Holberg (as we see in flashback), Erlendur is too late to prevent his suicide which extinguishes the catastrophic bloodline.

#### Hardboiled and hardwired

The domestic box-office success of this entertaining and accomplished movie testifies to the strong resonance of thematic concerns which have wider, even universal, relevance. The obvious hook is the Icelandic DNA mapping project run by private company deCODE Genetics Inc., with the usual hype promising medical revelation via Big Pharma's monopoly over life's biological substrates – despite its empirical basis being as dangerously shaky as the governmental thirst for scientific population management supposedly necessitating exhaustive identity intrusion. But the title namechecks Reykjavík's repository of the treasure troves of previous generations of pathologists – endless samples of pickled organs, etc. – whose fleshy monstrosity now upgrades to sanitised digital simulacra. As Erlendur has it: "Tragedies, sorrows, and death, all carefully classified in computers. Family stories and stories of individuals. Stories about me and you. You keep the whole secret and can call it up whenever you want. A Jar City for the whole nation". Whereas the novel was originally called *Myrin* ('the marshes' of Iceland's lowland) – more sharply capturing the complacent edifices of our time built upon

far murkier, unstable foundations; with the brave new hi-tech rhetoric merely a clinical corporate veneer on persistent older fictions which regiment racial purity, moral health and social conduct to suit the reproduction of hierarchy.

The point, of course, is that whatever significance is ascribed to the role of genetics, it's what people do with such ideas that really matters. And the attitudes of those involved in the plodding investigation here revolve around a comparable jarring of inward- and backward-looking fatalistic conservatism against the demands of an uncomfortable present and uncertain future. So prevailing homespun wisdom about dark deeds misguidedly blames the dire products of 'tainted blood' on 'incest, rape, or foreigners' – thus attributing to biological imperative various skeletons actually closeted by purely cultural prejudice. Meanwhile dialogue is peppered with the detectives' banter concerning their own and the suspects' personalities and tastes, with his assistants' contrasting narcissistic yuppie pretensions and sympathetic non-nonsense womanly intelligence offsetting Erlendur's authoritative macho. Yet his response to the wreckage of his private life transcends blind obedience to warrior stereotype – tending an injured thug he's chuckle down the stairs, and caring for the pregnant daughter he'd previously abandoned to promiscuous junkiehood. Ingrained laws – whether of the State or jungle – make



## Review

◀ page 15

humanitarian sense neither of the case at hand nor the routine redemptions of altruism, conviviality and love.

For that purpose, more open minds and hearts are required – precisely the potentials, as it happens, that decisive mutations in hominid evolution unleashed with the retention of infantile simian features. This neoteny – especially in brain morphology, and hence language and learning – relaxed fixed instinctual control allowing greater individual and collective adaptability and creativity. The rest is (human) history, with no programmed, predictable outcome – to the eternal dismay of control-freaks of all stripes. Ironic, then, to witness current

regressions to the comforting delusions of innate determinism, as sociobiology – neo-liberalism's ideological handmaiden – fashions just-so fantasies of perfectly calculating psychopaths maximising profitable ‘fitness’. But not as organisms, peskily stubborn as we have proved in insisting that a better world is possible. No, instead we're animated by swarms of sinister ‘selfish genes’, somehow orchestrating unbelievably intricate biochemical, behavioural, even conceptual patterns side-stepping social, cultural and political agency. And with this wholesale philosophical disavowal to be biotechnologically operationalised in the dissection and correction of chromosomes, you have to ask: Is this the apex of advanced civilised rationality, or proof positivist of the criminal insanity of capitalism?

[www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)

## THE QUIZ

- What do Exeter City Football Club, AFC Wimbledon, Futbol Club Barcelona and Borussia Mönchengladbach have in common?
- What happened when the US state of Nebraska changed the law to allow children up to age 19 to be legally abandoned?
- Why did baby marketing company Bounty pull out of the Baby Show exhibition?
- What links an insane Irish aristocrat with the anarchists Anteo Zamboni, Gino Lucetti and Michael Shirru, and a Slovenian anti-fascist group called TIGR?

Answers on page 14

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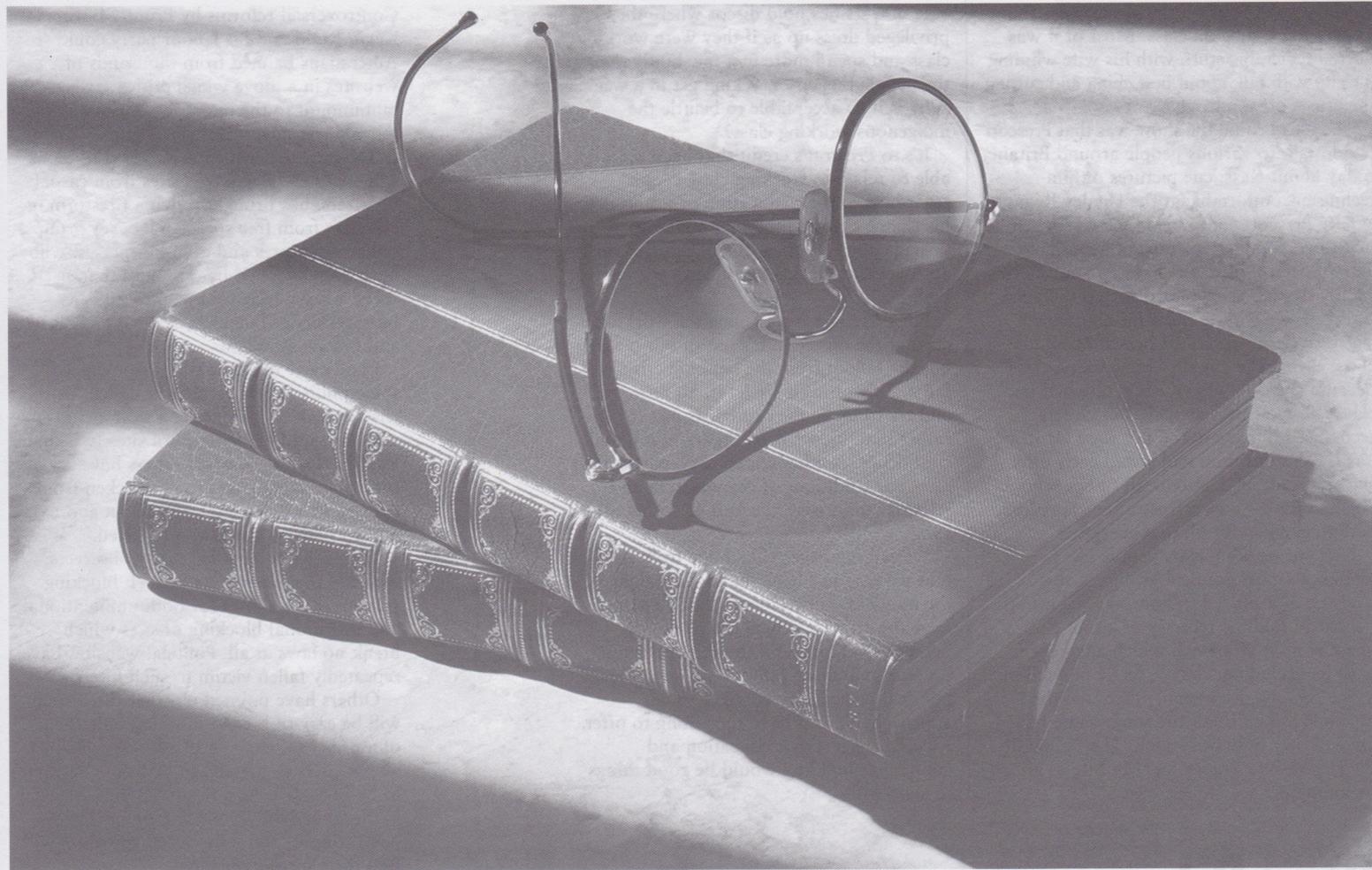
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# academics work together?



organising through the Anarchist Studies Network. This group can help coordinate and generate intellectual and practical enthusiasm for anarchist ideas both within the academy and beyond. The group is also concerned that its membership is overly filled with academic anarchists. This is not a huge problem – even academics need mutual aid networks – but the potential to become disengaged from the movement is something most worry about.

The ASN is a Political Studies Association (UK) specialist group for the study of anarchism. As a group we have organised three meetings, four mini-conferences, a joint conference with the 'Network of Activist Scholars in Politics and International Relations' (NASPIR), and one large stand alone-event this September. We have a small budget that we use predominantly to get people together rather than fund pet projects. So the bulk of our funding goes towards getting anarchist academics and other interested parties together.

This has helped us build a sense of community and mutual aid which was one of the explicit aims of the group from its inception (all the details can be found on our website, [anarchist-studies-network.org.uk](http://anarchist-studies-network.org.uk)). We hope this group goes from strength to

strength, but for this to be meaningful we need to start a discussion and involve non-academic anarchists.

Activists and academics can also tell each other where they're going wrong if and when a real debate gets going. This demands a forum where this debate can take place and a language that's non-alienating. While specialist languages are at the core of all communities, academics have a tendency towards jargon if all they do is speak to other academics.

If they were encouraged to make their points in plain English by a supportive but critical audience, then that would be positive critical engagement. If activists and academics saw the process of learning as being a two-way street, then reports, pamphlets and academic papers can be used by everyone in a spirit of conviviality and mutual support. This would help avoid activists being turned into 'lab rats' – fears that many might rightly have – and academics being conceived as out of touch.

How we produce knowledge is as important as why. So we also need to recognise that academia first and foremost produces knowledge. Making sure that the students, who are increasingly just fed in at one end of the

machine, stripped of their cash and spat out the other, get a rounded political education is vital.

Student groups were often prominent in the revolutionary impulse – charged with new and vitalising ideas. Throughout the twentieth century students have sought radical alternatives, but rarely gained the critical mass to truly challenge the mainstream consensus. A new spirit of mutual aid between anarchist activists and academics, students and workers, and recognition that the categories are never self-evidently distinct, would be worthwhile.

We could also do worse than recall George Bernard Shaw's maxim. He famously argued that "those who can, do; those who can't, teach". Typically the saying "those who can't, teach" is used as an insult, but the point remains – consciousness-raising can be done by deed, but it will be fleeting if it's not backed up by thoughtful and lasting argument.

Secondly, and related to this, academics can dedicate time to problems and can reflect on movement activities away from the cut and thrust of daily political struggle. This is a privilege that's worth exploiting. This sort of removed reflection is vital if the movement is to learn from itself rather than having a constant barrage of negative press and critique from those who know nothing of the movement.